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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA
LONDON FOR LORD, PARIS FOR NOBLES

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TAGS: PTER PBTS PINR PGOV PHUM PREL SY IZ

SUBJECT: SYRIAN SECURITY COURT HEARINGS: AL-QAEDA AND
FOREIGN FIGHTERS

Classified By: CDA Charles Hunter for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. Summary: A November Syrian Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) session heard two separate cases on individuals accused of belonging to al-Qaeda or al-Qaeda affiliated organizations, and participating in or supporting foreign fighter operations in Iraq. In a third case, one accused individual confessed before the court he had been recruited by Israeli intelligence operatives. End Summary.

¶2. (C) During a November 22 SSSC session, six individuals had hearings related to their alleged roles in assisting or being foreign fighters in Iraq, according to a report from Canadian Embassy and European Commission observers. In one hearing, Abdullah al-Hussein, Shahin Abd Rahman, Ibrahim Darwish, and Ali Hussein were reportedly accused of having "Salafi-Takfiri and jihadist tendencies," and illegal associations with foreign states. In addition, Abdullah al-Hussein was accused of having connections to Jund al-Sham through his relationship with Muhammad Shaher. The prosecutors' case against al-Hussein alleged he recruited young men to fight in Iraq and had rented apartments in Hasaka to house foreign fighters. Hussein denied his role and added he believed in the Wahabi doctrine, but was not a Takfiri. Shahin Abd Rahman also denied association with any extremist groups. Ibrahim Darwish and Ali Hussein admitted they had planned to join fighters in Iraq, but were apprehended by Syrian security agents in Hasaka before doing so. The four men's cases are slated to continue on December ¶13.

¶3. (SBU) Two brothers, Ahmed and Riad Shabri, were accused of being members of al-Qaeda. Riad confessed to the court of having joined al-Qaeda in 2004, and of then spending three months split between Falluja and Baqubah, Iraq. He denied participating in any fighting, claiming heavy bombardment of the area at the time had precluded the possibility of conducting any operations. (Note: no further information on the exact time Riad was in Iraq was reported.) Ahmed made no admissions of guilt, according to the EC reporting. The two men's trials were expected to resume on December 14.

¶4. (C) In another hearing during the aforementioned session, Radwan Ali Mesud confessed to having worked for the Israeli intelligence agency, Mossad. He told the court he had been approached by a relative living in Hungary who had put him in contact with Mossad agents. He eventually traveled to Tel Aviv and was trained in the Naharya settlement on how to transmit coded messages. Upon his return to Syria, he said

he only transmitted a single coded message, purely as a test and that this was the extent of his activities. The observers reported Mesud's interrogation during the hearing appeared a bit orchestrated. No information was ever presented on Mesud's past that would make him a worthy recruit. Throughout the questioning Mesud appeared confused and unable to recall details about his training in Israel, the delegate noted.

¶5. (C) Comment: The observers' suspicion of courtroom theater in the Mesud case may very well extend to the other al-Qaeda/FF hearings. Whether the staging is merely a case of coerced testimonies and kangaroo jurisprudence, or an attempt to shape the perception of western diplomats who attend the trials, is difficult to tell. What is noteworthy is that these hearings appear to focus on very low-level operatives. Even if the aforementioned individuals were guilty as charged, we would not be convinced that their hearings before the SSSC represent a concerted SARG effort to police border transgressions on foreign fighter facilitation activities in Syria.

HUNTER